

young and vaguely in love by FreshBrains

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Summary:

“Look, when a girl dates another girl, people call her names.”

“I wouldn’t let them,” El says firmly. “Nobody calls my friends mean names.”

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Author's Note:

For the DW femslashficit's Remainder Week challenge #130/Challenge #122 - date.

Character spoilers for season two, but not big plot spoilers. Abuse towards both Billy and Max is hinted at. I also imagine they kids still call Jane El even though her legal name is now Jane Hopper.

“Would you like to go on a date?”

Max slams her locker shut on her thumb. “*Shit,*” she hisses, sticking the sore finger in her mouth, “you fucking ninja.”

El crinkles her brow. “Not a ninja,” she says seriously. “I’m sorry I scared you.”

Max softens. “That’s okay.” Her thumb still throbs. If she were with Lucas or Dustin she’d tease them—*kiss it better?* But she has a feeling El would actually do it.

“Wait,” she says, leaning back against her closed locker. “Did you just ask me on a date?”

El nods earnestly. Her hair is getting long and messy again, curls tucked behind her ears, and she’s got on these big sparkly earrings Nancy got her for her birthday—clips, of course, since Chief Hopper said no to piercings, even when Max begged him to let her take El to the mall when she turned sixteen.

She looks really pretty. Max is starting to learn a thing or two about how pretty girls make her feel, and El is the prettiest girl she knows, by, like, a *mile*. Everyone thinks so. Or maybe only she and Mike think so. They don’t tend to talk about these things.

“Girls don’t date each other,” she says, the words coming out harsher than she intended. “Get a clue.”

If El is hurt, she doesn't show it. "Dating is for friends who want to be something more. Don't you want that?" El follows Max down the hall as Max hoofs it to third period, books resting on her hip. El's combat boots clunk loudly against the linoleum, the plastic ends of the laces skittering like beetles. "Mike wanted that. It's nice."

"Exactly," Max says, whirling around. They keep up their brisk pace with Max walking backwards and El facing her. This is a practiced walk—Max leading confidently and El following, Max the teacher and El the student. Max eventually taught El all the naughty stuff about being a teenage girl—how to sneak out through the cellar, how to lie to Hopper about the phone bill, how to blow a perfect smoke ring. El ate that shit up.

"You usually only do that with one person at a time," Max elaborates. "That's what makes dating special."

"But you date Dustin *and* Lucas," El pushes.

"Because they're both *special*," Max says, frustrated. And they *are* special, two of the most special people in her life. She just wishes she...*wanted* them more. "Look, when a girl dates another girl, people call her names."

And they make up rumors about her, and then Mom and Neil would hear them, and Neil would call her those names and Mom would cry, and then maybe they'd send her away like they did with Billy.

"I wouldn't let them," El says firmly. "Nobody calls my friends mean names."

Max sighs. Third period starts in two minutes, but she jerks her head towards the girls' bathroom and El follows her in. They dump their books on the sink and Max fishes her smokes out of her sweatshirt pocket. She listens for other girls in the stalls but it's silent.

"I don't like when people talk about me," Max admits. She busies herself with fixing her hair in the mirror, cigarette dangling from her mouth. "About any of us." They used to have an iota of immunity, especially when Nancy and Jonathan were still in school, but now that they and Steve are off at college, there's nobody to protect them

but El, which begs the question—who will protect El?

El runs her fingers absently through Max's hair, gently tugging out the tangles. "Pretty," she whispers, like she often does when she and Max are alone. "They're always talking. All they do is talk. Let them."

Max watches herself in the mirror and blows smoke at her reflection. El is still admiring Max's hair, smoothing strands over Max's shoulder. "If you want to date me, you probably can't date Mike."

El shrugs. "Dating isn't fucking."

Max feels herself turn red from hairline to toes. "Well jeez, how do you think dates *end*?"

"With a kiss," El says simply. She leans in and presses her lips against the part of Max's neck that was revealed after she swept her hair back. "Kissing is nice. It can just be kissing, or it can be something else." She kisses Max on the cheek, and Max watches them in the mirror, shaking with a strange, giddy elation she can't find the urge to quell.

El has on bright pink lipstick that leaves a punch-colored mark on Max's neck. Max stole it for her from the drugstore, which Chief Hopper caught her for. He was more upset about the makeup than the stealing. El had to put it on in Max's car in the morning.

"You've thought this through, haven't you?" Max flicks her cigarette butt into the sink and runs the water. Now she can't stop thinking about it—action flicks, the arcade, the new Mexican restaurant on Main Street. Holding hands under a booth, giggling as they walk home after making out in the backseat of the Camaro (which refuses to start more than half the time these days). "It'll be hard. Harder than you think." She wonders which part will be harder—keeping it a secret or dealing with it when the secret inevitably comes out.

El smiles, a small thing that makes Max smile back. "I think we'll manage." She curls her index finger in the belt loop of Max's jeans. "Let's go on a date Friday night. Dad will pay. I'll ask him for twenty dollars."

And Max finally laughs, scooping El in for a hug. "You're fearless," she says, voice thick with reverence. El's hair smells like roses and warm metal.

"So are you," El says. She's shorter than Max, so she rests her cheek against Max's chest. Max can feel her smiling. "We're the Mage and the Zoomer. We can do anything we want."

Author's Note:

Title from the song "'93: Me and Fred and Dave and Ted" by the Magnetic Fields.